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DATE: March 19, 2020
RE: COVID-19 Symptoms – Fitness for Duty and Return to Work
TO: Employers in Bay County

Bay County Health Department (BCHD) is aware that many area employers have questions regarding best practices for limiting and controlling exposure to and spread of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in the workplace. As an occupational medicine physician, I am keenly aware of the desire to balance the interests of the employer, the employee, and the public without being overly restrictive on the ability of people to work and earn an income.

As we are still in the early phase of the COVID-19 pandemic AND access to testing remains essentially unavailable in this area, an appropriate strategy at this time will include:

1. Advising all employees to self-monitor and immediately report onset of any of the typical COVID-19 symptoms, including fever, cough, and shortness of breath.
2. Presuming that all employees who report new onset of such symptoms are potential cases of COVID-19.
3. Excluding from work all employees experiencing symptoms:
 - a. Directing employees who are at work and report symptoms to leave work immediately.
 - b. Directing employees who are at home and report symptoms to stay home.
4. Advising employees to stay home and self-isolate until (whichever of these two criteria is later):
 - a. at least 7 days have passed since symptoms first appeared; and/or
 - b. at least 3 days (72 hours) have passed since recovery, defined as resolution of fever without the use of fever-reducing medications (e.g., Tylenol) and resolution of respiratory symptoms (i.e., cough and shortness of breath).

Relevant guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention can be found here:

- Non-test based criteria for return to work for healthcare personnel
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/healthcare-facilities/hcp-return-work.html>
- Preventing the spread of coronavirus in homes and residential communities
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/hcp/guidance-prevent-spread.html>

Employees with an alternate diagnosis (e.g., have documented positive test result for influenza) should return to work based on that diagnosis, in consultation with your employer's occupational health provider.

Employers of healthcare workers and other providers of essential community services (e.g., police, firefighters, utility workers, correctional officers) might need to follow alternative policies for establishing fitness for duty and return to work in order to maintain, augment, and stretch those workforces in response to the strain the pandemic will apply.

Please understand that BCHD's guidance on this topic is applicable for the time being. As the pandemic wears on and a larger percentage of the population is exposed, you can expect this guidance to be revised and possibly become somewhat less restrictive at some point in the future.

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